



The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

If we are to win the war and the peace, we must through the grim months before us try to hold together in our minds two ways of looking at Germany. Our moral being revolts against the hideous inhumanity which has again, as a year ago, launched the brutal German war machine against small peoples who desired only peace and freedom. But these feelings must not be allowed to submerge the human reality of the German people, with whom we shall have to live together after the war. The question which I propose to ask in this News-Letter is what elements must enter into a Christian approach to the problem of Germany.

THE BASIS OF TRUTH

For the reconstruction of Europe nothing is more important than to know the *truth* about Germany. Nothing solid can be built except on the foundation of facts, pleasant or unpleasant. The more generous and optimistic view of the German people is not necessarily the more Christian; where facts are concerned, the first Christian duty is to see them without illusion.

It is equally necessary to recognize that truth in these matters is hard to reach. The facts about a nation are inexhaustible in their multitude and complexity; every generalisation is in danger of leaving out important factors. This difficulty would remain, even if we were completely disinterested. But in actual fact our selection and estimate of the facts is largely determined by our interest. Every judgment that we make is coloured to an extent of which we are unaware, on the one hand, by the fears, hatreds and resentments engendered by the war, or on the other hand, by the desire to escape from an intolerable situation by pretending, as the sentimentalists do, that realities are less disagreeable than they are and that to solve the problems on paper is to solve them in fact.

The character of Nazi Germany has been made sufficiently plain by the utterances and actions of Nazi leaders. It is the deliberate throwing aside of the restraints and inhibitions which distinguish civilisation from barbarism, the unashamed assertion that man's lower nature is his real nature, the deliberate saying to evil, "Be thou my good." If any of you doubt these statements, or wish to understand more fully what they mean, I would urge you to read Dr. Hermann Rauschning's new book, *The Beast from the Abyss*.¹ There is still in wide circles an ignorance of what it is against which we are fighting. I was told the other day that some people are saying: "Now that we have got the same economic system as the Nazis, why need we go on fighting?" The essence of Nazism is not its economic doctrines, but the fact that it is the embodiment of a conception of life which involves the complete destruction of man. It may be also that there are powerful interests in this or other countries which for selfish and material reasons want to come to terms with Nazism. That would be to hand mankind over to the dominion of the most evil thing that has appeared in history, and must be met with the most vehement resistance. The German people are today enslaved to the rule of unprincipled and lawless men and to the

blind worship of a "mortal God," and are held in the grip of a mass hysteria. The first step towards freeing them is the defeat and overthrow of the soulless might in which they have put their trust.

The next question we have to face, if we are seeking the truth about Germany, is whether Nazi Germany is the real Germany. Is Nazism the true expression of the German national character? There is a powerful school of thought which maintains that it is. I believe that it is a fundamental mistake to identify the Nazis and Germany—a mistake both in fact and in policy.

When we speak of the German national character we may intend one or other, or both, of two different things. We may mean certain inherited, unalterable qualities in the racial make-up of the German people. It is doubtless true that among the Germans, as among all races, there are certain inborn aptitudes and dispositions which are more common and widespread than among other peoples. But such inherited tendencies, whether good or bad, are very general in character and capable of developing in many directions. An individual starts life with an inheritance that has fixed limits in certain directions but also with endless possibilities, only a small fraction of which can be realised. Which of these possibilities is encouraged or discouraged depends on the natural and social environment in which he finds himself. Similarly the predominant aptitudes and dispositions of peoples are so shaped and modified by historical and social experiences as to have little importance for our present purpose. It would be a calamity if in resisting Nazism we were to succumb to the Nazi racial theory which, pushed to its logical conclusion, denies every Christian and human value.

The question of crucial importance is what the Germans are now as the result of their historical experiences and of the ideas by which their minds have been formed, and how they have acted in modern history. I say modern history, because it does not really matter today what the Vandals were like or how Charlemagne acted; too much of decisive importance has happened in Europe and in Germany since that time. But, if we take the history of Germany in recent times, we can see very clearly that powerful tendencies of thought in the past century or two have led to the dominance of the idea of the absolute, unlimited, non-moral State, and that these tendencies have found their culminating and unqualified expression in Nazi doctrine and aims. This was convincingly shown in the striking supplement to C.N.L. No. 21.¹ There has grown up in Germany a certain type of thought which is a menace to the peace of Europe; and the situation is aggravated by the fact that the Nazis have used their period of power to indoctrinate youth with their soul-destroying doctrines. These facts cannot be left out of account. Those who are alarmed lest the democratic peoples, when the war is over, may experience a revulsion of feeling and shrink from a responsible and resolute dealing with realities, and through this irresponsibility make another war inevitable, are right in warning us against these dangers. War-weariness and sentimental dreaming have nothing to do with Christianity, and we must not confuse them. It is a just demand that until there is ground for believing that the German people have a changed outlook they should be deprived of the means of inflicting further sufferings on other peoples.

THE HOPE OF REDEMPTION

The German people cannot escape the consequences of what they have allowed to be done in their name, and the roots of Nazism go back into German history. But that is no ground for saying that Nazism and Germany are the same thing, and to identify them is a mistake not only in fact but in policy. It is fantastic to suppose that eighty million people can be held down by force alone or that, if they could, the British are the people to do it. If we are to build any enduring European structure after the war, our primary task is to bring about in Germany a revulsion against Nazi ideas. There are among the

¹ There is an instructive and still relevant treatment of the same questions in a small volume published during the last war, and now unfortunately out of print—*The German Soul*, by Baron von Hügel.

Germans large numbers who detest the Nazi regime, and still larger numbers who are disillusioned and miserable. It is essential for rebuilding Europe to inspire these element with hope and to offer them a real alternative to Nazism. Nothing would so surely or so quickly achieve the ends for which we are fighting as to transform the war in the mind of the German people from a war *against* Germans to a war *for* Germans. The people of Germany will rally round Hitler to the last, if we tell them that we lump them all together in a common condemnation. Why should we be so foolish as to set in opposition things which must be combined in order to achieve our aims? It will be the responsibility of the victors in the war to determine the lines of the new order in Europe and to impose and maintain by force the conditions which will allow it to take root; but we can succeed in this task only by making it clear that the new order which we seek to create is one in which the German people will be able to serve their real human interests, and by enlisting their co-operation in establishing it. Everything must be deprecated that distracts public attention from the crucial problem, which is how the national life of Germany may be freed from the poison of Nazi doctrine.

The question goes deeper than the need for a wise and creative national policy. In the refusal to identify Nazism and the German people the Christian view of man is involved. Christianity teaches that man—German and British alike—is a being who is a prey to evil forces and false doctrines, but that it is the purpose of God that he should be redeemed from them. The tendencies which have culminated in Nazism are common to western civilisation. Only if we realise this can we understand what a terrible menace Nazism is. A spiritual evil which has infected the whole of civilisation has found its supreme manifestation in Germany and, because it has clothed itself there with military and political power, it has to be dethroned from that position. But if we stop short at that, the evil will only re-appear in other, and perhaps more terrible, forms. Merely to win the war will not save us from the dangers which threaten to engulf our civilisation. The only thing that can avert this peril is that we and our allies and our enemies should become sharers in a common redemption. All of us alike need to be delivered from scepticism and despair, from the worship of false gods and the pursuit of mistaken ends, and to discover afresh what makes life really worth living.

EDUCATING FOR AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Writing not merely as an educationist but as a father with an insecure future and four children to provide for, Mr. Middleton Murry, in a paper entitled "Education for Chaos" in *The Adelphi* for February and March, discusses the kind of education which is needed for living in the post-war world. Even if the future proves to be less dark than he fears, he is certainly right in maintaining that we cannot educate without some picture of the kind of society in which the pupils are going to live.

Assuming a world in which many of the familiar landmarks and accustomed supports will for many have disappeared, Mr. Murry asks what kind of education he would choose for his children with such a prospect before them. His answer is—"an education that will enable them to keep alive both their bodies and their souls." They must be trained to turn their hands to anything—to be capable of becoming Robinson Crusoes by learning to do a whole variety of things for themselves. They need to acquire a manifold and flexible skill that will enable them to respond creatively to the situations which they meet. If they possess this quality they will never be without a job of creative work to do even if they are technically unemployed for considerable periods. Girls also must be taught the primary skills which will make them the fitting helpmates and co-partners of pioneers. They must be able to keep house and keep it well on the equivalent of an unemployed allowance. They must be free from the desire for the trimmings of life which is an urge on their men to jump on the band wagon. Their ambition must lie rather towards the embodiment of the true values of a good life and the communication of them to their children.

Mr. Murry believes not only that this type of education may be a practical necessity but that it has spiritual and essentially religious values. The first is the replacement of the money value by the use value. Men learn to esteem things for what they are. A little thing that was despised for its cheapness and abundance—a nail, a screw, a tin box, a piece of cardboard—again becomes precious. The second value to which men will be forced to return is a sense of their dependence upon mother earth. The destruction of shipping may be expected to throw men back on their own resources, and to bring about a sudden, immediately painful but ultimately beneficent, tearing away of the intricate network of international trade, which serves as a veil to conceal from men their dependence on nature and on God.

These values Mr. Murry believes to be the natural stepping-stones to spiritual truth. There is much talk of bringing religion into men's lives. But for the most part it means nothing more than the verbal establishment of a connection, which is impossible to establish in reality, between an abstract religion and a life which is lived in slavish obedience to economic and irreligious compulsions. The divorce between Sunday religion and week-day behaviour will not be healed simply by attempting to inculcate doctrinal religion into the young, but by introducing them to a mode of life of which the natural texture is religious. The attempt to reanimate supernatural piety in youth while the foundation of natural piety is non-existent is only to prepare them for a manhood of revulsion and despair.

Finally this type of education will not be without its effect on the political life of society. By training boys to be men who are personally immune from the contagion of social disintegration, you are preparing centres of resistance to the evils of totalitarianism. Men so trained will by their simple example inspire innumerable efforts at local independence and supply the positive antidote to that feeling of dependence and hopelessness which gives rise to the mass man and allows him to fall a prey to the new absolutism.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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